Carex comosa Boott.

bristly sedge

Cyperaceae (Sedge Family)

Status: State Sensitive
Rank: G5S2

General Description: Adapted from Hitchcock et al. (1969): Stems coarse, mostly 20 to 40 inches tall, more or less densely clustered on a short, stout rhizome. Leaves glabrous, tending to be septate-nodulose (especially the sheaths), the blade elongate, flat, 1/8 to ½ inch wide. Leaf subtending the lowest pistillate spike sheathless or with only a short sheath, the blade well developed, elongate, surpassing and sometimes several times as long as the inflorescence. Pistillate spikes several, mostly 3 to 5, ¾ to 2¾ inches long and about 2/3 inch thick, loose and more or less nodding on the slender peduncles, tending to be grouped rather closely together. Staminate spike solitary, terminal, up to 2½ inches long, or the terminal spike sometimes androgynous or gynaecandrous or with the perigynia in the middle. Pistillate scales with a short, largely scarious or hyaline body only 1/16 inch long and a prominent awn tip 1/16 to ¼ inch long. Perigynia very numerous, densely crowded, spreading or retrorse, usually pale greenish ¼ to 1/3 inch long, prominently 15 to 20 nerved, lanceolate or lance-ovate, tapering to a short-stipitate base, firm-textured and only slightly or scarcely inflated, prominently long-beaked, the beak conspicuously bidentate, with slender, firm, arcuate or divergent teeth 1/16 inch long. Stigmas 3. Achene trigonous, loose in the lower half of the perigynium, 1/16 inch long, continuous with the persistent, bony style, this straight of sometimes becoming flexuous or contorted.

Identification Tips: The drooping spikes have a “bottle brush” appearance. The long divergent perigynia teeth are also characteristic. *Carex hystericina* also has pendant nodding spikes, but the teeth on the perigynium beak are smaller. *Carex utriculata* lacks long divergent teeth on the beak and its spikes are more erect.

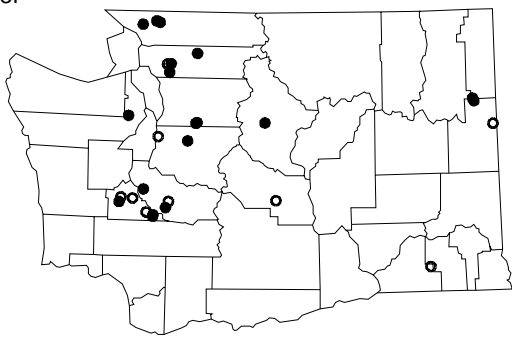
Phenology: Identifiable May through July.

Range: The taxon occurs from southeastern Canada to Minnesota, generally southward to central Florida and west to Texas. In the west, the taxon occurs from California to Washington, eastward to Idaho. In Washington, occurrences are scattered throughout the state.

Carex comosa

bristly sedge

Known distribution of *Carex comosa* in Washington



● Current (1980+)
○ Historic (older than 1980)

Carex comosa

bristly sedge

2000 Produced as part of a cooperative project between the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Natural Heritage Program, and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. Persons needing this information in an alternate format may call (360)902-1340 or TTY (360)902-1125.

Carex comosa

bristly sedge

Habitat: Marshes, lake shores, and wet meadows. Associated species may include *Carex utriculata*, *Potentilla palustris*, *Typha latifolia*, *Spiraea douglasii*, *Dulichium arundinaceum*, and *Phalaris arundinacea*. Elevation ranges from 50 to 2000 feet.

Ecology: *Carex comosa* is an obligate wetland species (USFWS 1988). It is apparently a long-lived species that invades gaps in wetlands. The species grows vegetatively for the first years and then flowers when larger. This strategy allows *Carex comosa* to invade a gap and then hold the gap for up to a decade while producing large crops of seeds which in turn invade new gaps (Bernard and Seischab 1994).

State Status Comments: There are fewer than 20 recent occurrences in Washington. Most populations are quite small.

Inventory Needs: Additional inventory throughout the state is needed. Reports of the species occurring in drainage ditches in King and Pierce counties need to be documented.

Threats and Management Concerns: Threats to the taxon include changes in water regime and invasion of habitat by reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea)*. In addition, logging, and shoreline development are potential threats.

Comments: This species is commercially available. The potential for cultivated plants to escape and their potential for affecting the native gene pool is unknown. Distinguishing cultivated material from native, naturally occurring individuals may also be problematic.

References:

Bernard, J.M., and F.K. Seischab. 1994. Life history of shoots of *Carex comosa* F. Boott. Rhodora 96(886): 179-189.

Hitchcock, C. L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, and J.W. Thompson. 1969. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest, Part 1: Vascular Cryptogams, Gymnosperms, and Monocotyledons.* University of Washington Press, Seattle. 914 pp.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1988. National list of vascular plant species that occur in wetlands. USFWS Biological Report 88 (24).

2000 Produced as part of a cooperative project between the Washington Department of Natural Resources, Washington Natural Heritage Program, and the U.S.D.I. Bureau of Land Management. Persons needing this information in an alternate format may call (360)902-1340 or TTY (360)902-1125.